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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JEDDAH 000659

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SUBJECT: MOSQUE SERMONS FOR SAUDI ARABIA, SEPTEMBER 22:
MECCA, MEDINA, AL-KHOBAR

Classified By: Acting Consul General CB Toney,
for reasons 1.4 (c) and (d)

MECCA: ISLAM SPREAD PEACEFULLY

¶1. (C) Shaykh Usamah bin-Abdallah Khayyat delivered the sermon at the Grand Mosque in Mecca on September 22. The imam condemned statements made against Islam without mentioning Pope Benedict XVI by name. The sermon opposed the view that Islam has been spread through violence. The imam said, "The call to Islam still exists on love, choice, and conviction, based on proof and far from compulsion, coercion, and intimidation." He continued, "Jihad in the cause of God was sanctioned to protect the freedom of the call and to remove any obstacles before it. It was not sanctioned at all to oppress people or to force them to convert to Islam. Therefore, it is not correct to say that Islam spread all over the world by violence and the sword. It is a false claim that has no basis." The imam attributed the spread of Islam to trade and "righteous Muslims" who influenced others to accept Islam.

CAUTION AGAINST "HASTY ACTIONS"

¶2. (C) The imam cautioned against hasty actions caused by anger. He advised Muslims to "not get involved in erroneous and forbidden behavior, such as death and destruction, sabotage, arson, and such corrupt methods, which God and his messenger have forbidden, and thus become a cause and an opportunity" for non-Muslims to criticize Islam.

¶3. (C) The sermon concluded with prayers for Allah to support Islam and Muslims, destroy the enemies of religion, tyrants, and the corrupt, unify Muslims, and guide their rulers. Prayers were also offered for safety from evil.

MEDINA: METHOD OF ISLAM IS DIALOGUE,
CONVICTION, ARGUMENT, AND PROOF

¶4. (C) Shaykh Abd-al-Bari bin-Awad delivered the sermon at the holy mosque in Medina. The sermon addressed Pope

Benedict XVI,s remarks about Islam. The imam said, "The greatness of Islam appears in addressing the People of the Book with the method of dialogue, conviction, argument and proof...dispute not with the People of the Book, except with means better than mere deputation; unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong and injury." The imam referred to the "media campaign against Islam" and said that it has roots "as old as Islam." Drawing a historical link, he held that it is "one of the methods of repulsion against the path of God, beginning with the unbelievers of Quraysh and until our modern era." The imam explained that many, particularly People of the Book, are "angered" by the spread of Islam, and after "failing" to find real claims against Islam and the Prophet, they have resorted to "distortion through the media."

ISLAM WAS NOT SPREAD BY THE SWORD

15. (C) The imam said, "Islam did not march to Africa and parts of Asia with the sword. The sword did not reach those areas. Islam reached them through traders and travelers and their good example and manners. The talk that Islam is a religion that was established by the sword is a vicious and poisonous claim."

CALL FOR APOLOGY FROM POPE

16. (C) The imam called for the Pope to "openly apologize to all Muslims" for his "despicable" statements. The imam warned that such statements "provoke feelings, sow the seeds

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of division, and rouse sedition and hostilities with serious consequences, which only God knows." (Comment: The imam seems to be alluding to violent acts, "caused" by the Pope,s words. End Comment.)

ISLAM DISTORTED BY WESTERN MEDIA

17. (C) The imam expressed support for "practical and scientific plans" to explain Islam. "We have failed in conveying the message of Islam. The true Islamic message has not reached all people. It is being distorted through western media." (Comment: The imam stressed the oft-argued claim that the "media" is distorting Islam, Muslims, and the Middle East. It is a positive sign that the imam is supporting a "scientific" approach to Islam, though most likely this will entail carefully selecting "scientific" evidence that "proves" the claims of Islam, and not necessarily approaching the entire subject with the scientific method in mind. End Comment.)

18. (C) In the second sermon, the imam hailed the month of Ramadan. He called on Muslims to seek forgiveness and receive the month with purified hearts. He concluded with a prayer to support Islam and keep Muslims safe.

AL-KHOBAR: RAMADAN IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR GOOD DEEDS

19. (C) The substitute imam, once again delivered the sermon at the Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal Mosque. The whereabouts of Shaikh Mohammad al-Qahtani are still unknown. The imam spoke of the rules during the month of Ramadan and of its significance in the life of a Muslim. He explained that Ramadan is a "great opportunity" for Muslims "to earn extra good points for good behavior and dedication" to God. The imam encouraged the people to do good deeds, use kind words, and help the less fortunate, adding that "God rewards

good deeds done in Ramadan in "greater proportions than regular days." The sermon was concluded by reviewing examples from the Prophet,s life during Ramadan.

TONEY